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SUBJECT: Services, Safety and Management Ongoing Concerns in Moroccan Prisons

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Six Americans have been arrested in Morocco in the past five months, more than were arrested in all of FY07. The recent increase has expanded Post's knowledge of the prison system and the issues Americans face while incarcerated, including few provisions for their basic needs, bribery, and poor security. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The arrests have been made on a variety of charges including drug trafficking, robbery, sex tourism, desertion and failure to pay child support. Sentences have ranged from 15 days to six years. Police incarcerated prisoners in Tangiers, Marrakesh, Sale and Casablanca and Post has recently visited each prison at least once, if not repeatedly. The majority of cases involve dual nationals, including Moroccan-Americans, a Nigerian-American and a German-American. There are currently five Amcits in prison.

PRISONERS EXPECTED TO PROVIDE FOR THEMSELVES

¶3. (SBU) The primary issue for prisoners is organizing sufficient support for their personal needs. The prison provides food of poor quality and prisoners are expected to augment it with food provided by their family or by buying food from the prison cantina. Similarly, clothes, sleeping gear, and personal hygiene products must all be provided by the prisoner, his or her family or purchased from the prison. Prisoners can set up accounts with the prison to purchase needed goods. Foreign prisoners often trade what they have or receive from their families for other goods that they need if they do not have access to cash.

¶4. (SBU) Crowding is another major issue. In Casablanca's Okacha prison, the largest in Morocco, one of the wardens estimated that there are approximately 8,000 male prisoners and another 300 female prisoners in a space that was designed to hold 5,000 prisoners. Often 10-15 men are squeezed into a single cell. Most prisons, though, have special sections for foreigners that are generally less crowded and have better conditions.

SECURITY OFTEN LACKING

¶5. (SBU) Security at the prisons varies but is often relaxed. The guards do not carry weapons nor do they inspect everyone entering the prison. There are few metal detectors and all searches are done by hand with no additional equipment. The metal detectors that are in place are not functional on a day-to-day basis and may only be used when an official is visiting the prison. Okacha, which has approximately 8300 prisoners, has 500 guards; a ratio of 16 prisoners to a single guard.

¶6. (SBU) Family is allowed to visit and bring large bags of goods into the prison for an incarcerated relative. During visiting hours, families gather close to the primary prison gate and wait to be let in. From there, they proceed to a general waiting area where they undergo an overall inspection before proceeding into another waiting area to meet with their relative. Relatives of wealthy and

well-connected prisoners are not inspected to and do not wait in the general area. They are quickly escorted into the prison where they can meet with their relative in nicer waiting rooms. Anything they bring to the prisoner then receives a general inspection before the prisoner carries it back to his cell.

¶17. (SBU) The prison in Sale, known to hold some of Morocco's worst criminals and terrorists, had tight security outside of the prison but seemingly relaxed internal security. Before entering, credentials for ConOff and Locally Engaged Staff were repeatedly checked. However, once inside, ConOff and LES were escorted into a locked general waiting area and left for almost an hour with more than 40 prisoners but no prison guards. Some prisoners were meeting with their lawyers in side rooms while others were talking with other inmates. ConOff and LES had to search for someone to help them contact the individuals they were there to see. This is the only time we were left with inmates in a general holding area in the course of more than 10 visits to different prisons.

INMATES NEGOTIATE BETWEEN "OFFICIAL" RULES AND REALITY

¶18. (SBU) Bribery is common and prisoners quickly learn to navigate between "official" rules and the prison reality. For example, officially, cell phones are prohibited in prison. In reality, all of our prisoners have managed to access cell phones regularly to contact our offices and their families or friends. A prison warden at Okacha alleged that one American prisoner was regularly using drugs in prison - though officially such behavior is illegal. Post is also aware of prisoners getting into knife fights despite officials rules prohibiting weapons. Many prisoners have also managed to arrange for access to cash without our help or the prison's official involvement.

¶19. (SBU) Management at the prisons is mixed. Post is dependent on its relationships with individual wardens for help and information.

Other guards and wardens generally do not know how to respond to our requests. For ACS staff, prison management is a concern. Most prison records are kept by hand and there is little evidence the prisons use computers to track prisoners or any related data such as visitor information. Okacha is working to computerize its records but it is a slow process that has yet to yield results. This is a particular issue when dealing with Moroccan-Americans who are often not identified as Americans until Post visits them and thus are kept in the general prison. (Note: Post is usually notified about the arrest of a Moroccan-American by a family member or by the individual, not the police.) Once identified as Americans, they are moved to a nicer section for foreigners but first the prison must locate the prisoner and their records.

¶10. Comment: Based on Post's experience, we are revising our SOPs and training materials covering arrests to better respond to the concerns and issues outlined above.

Greene